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UNITARIANS

ENTITLED TO

THE NAME OF CHRISTIANS.

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The following tract is a discourse, delivered by its author in England, in October, 1831. It was occasioned by an Address, referred to on page 7, and is "designed to prove that all who learn of Christ are fellow Christians, and that his universal church is bounded by no sectarian limits."

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UNITARIANS ENTITLED TO

THE NAME OF CHRISTIANS.

What is it to be a Christian? The answer to this question seems to me to be distinctly implied, if not directly conveyed, in the words from which we learn the origin, and the primitive meaning, of the term. "The *disciples* were called Christians first in Antioch." To be a Christian is to be a disciple of Christ, or in other words to receive him as a divinely commissioned instructor, as one authorised by God to teach, and of whom, consequently, it is the duty of man to learn. This is a clear, simple, and comprehensive definition, for which I am convinced that no better can be substituted. All are Christians, be their peculiar opinions of Christ's doctrine what they may, who take him for their Lord and Master, and confess themselves under a divinely imposed obligation to yield a faithful obedience to his commands.

In the very first age of the Christian church, no less than in the present, we know from the best authority that the words and will of our common Lord were on some topics variously interpreted by his followers, who accordingly began, even before the death of the Apostles, to separate into sects and parties, and mutually to stigmatize

each other's views and opinions as erroneous and heretical. I am of Paul, said one, and I of Cephas, said another, and I of Apollos, said a third. All, however, professed to be of Christ; nor do we read of any who had the presumption to deny to their fellow Christians, on the ground of a mere difference of opinion, the Christian name. What right indeed could they have to do so? If, as the text above quoted implies, Christian, in its primary use, was a general appellation to which every disciple of Christ, as such, was entitled, it is obvious that it could not be withheld from any one who acknowledged the great Teacher's authority, and sincerely professed to learn of him.

A disciple of Christ is one who places himself under him as a Master and Instructor, who sits at his feet and listens to his precepts, with an unfeigned desire and resolution, so far as he can understand, to obey them. He may be slow to comprehend, — or prone to mistake, — the meaning of his Master's instructions; he may be a dull, unapprehensive, blundering pupil; but so long as he frequents the Master's school, sincerely professes respect for his authority, and endeavors, however imperfectly and unsuccessfully, to understand and profit by his lessons, according to the degree of ability that God has given to him, the rights and privileges of discipleship are fairly his; the benevolent Instructor will not withhold, nor will the noble-minded and generous associate in study dispute them. Jesus Christ assuredly is not the master who, on the sole ground of incapacity or mistake, will banish any pupil from his presence, or disown his connexion with him. "How long shall I bear with you?" he may say; but with every sincere and honest-minded disciple he *will* bear long. No errors of the head will he permit to con-

quer his patience or his love, and even many errors of the heart he will put to the account of human frailty, and allow the perverse and wayward pupil time to atone for them by the after-workings of deep and heart-felt penitence.

Surely he who pardoned all those that were offended because of him, on that awful night on which he fell a victim to the treachery of Judas, — and who so soon restored to his confidence and love the disciple that had denied him thrice, — surely he is not the master who will banish any one of his followers from his presence, or forbid him to assume his honored name, for no reason more cogent than this, that, with every wish to understand, he has, from prejudice, or precipitancy, or deficiency of judgment, misunderstood his doctrine. To the impenitent workers of iniquity we are told indeed that Jesus will say, "Depart from me — I never knew you;" but where do we learn, or what ground have we to suppose, that he will pronounce so harsh a sentence on the unfortunate victims of involuntary error? On the contrary, is it not his own declaration that the morally "blind have no sin," and that he who, from ignorance, "committeth things worthy of stripes shall be beaten with few stripes?"

What then must we think of those professed followers of our Lord, who, not contented with asserting and advocating (as it is doubtless their right and duty to do, provided they do it in the spirit of meekness,) their own views of his doctrine, presume to deny, not merely the sound judgment, but the good faith and sincerity of those who happen to think differently from themselves; and would absolutely banish them from the Master's school, and forbid them to assume his very name, because they cannot

acquiesce in *their* private interpretation of his words! "You are not disciples of Christ," say they, "because you do not think of him and his instructions as we do. You call yourselves his followers indeed, and pretend to sit at his feet and learn of him, but your pretensions are insincere. You can have no real reverence for his authority, you must be altogether destitute of that docility which is essential to discipleship. Wherefore? "Because the lessons which proceed from the Master's lips do not excite in your minds the same ideas that they excite in ours." Is this the language of modest, humble-minded learners? Would such be found arrogating to themselves, and to those who think with them, not merely all the sound sense and acute discernment, but likewise all the deference, docility, and good-feeling of the school?

Methinks it is for the Master, rather than for the scholar, to pronounce on the comparative merit of his pupils, to say who has listened with the most attentive and docile mind, who has best understood his meaning, and who has most faithfully applied to practice the lessons he has taught. If *he* shall declare any of his professed disciples to be unworthy of his name, and shall pronounce upon them the awful sentence of expulsion, his decision will doubtless be final, and will rest on grounds of reason and of justice which the unhappy culprits will have no power to dispute; but that decision, I have little hesitation in affirming, no fellow-disciple, who properly feels his position, and understands his duty, as a learner, — as one who is himself liable to errors both in theory and practice, — will either dare or desire to anticipate. "*I* perfectly understand the lessons which *you* ignorantly or intentionally pervert. *I* listen with an intelligence and a

docility of which *you* are destitute. We should not sit upon the same form together. The same school should not contain us. I alone am worthy of the name of a disciple." This is the language not of a well-grounded, modest, self-confidence, but of arrogance and presumption, and it may well be doubted whether they who utter it are indeed the well-instructed pupils that they profess to be, or whether they have not yet to learn what it imports them most to know, — namely, "what manner of spirit they are of."

All the disciples of Christ, all, that is, who profess sincerely to believe in Christ's divine mission and authority, — to form their faith upon his doctrines, and to guide their practice by his precepts, are entitled to the name of Christians, if the term be used in that sense, in which we are informed that it was first employed at Antioch. In two other passages of Scripture only do we find it, and in neither of these is its signification restricted to the professors of any peculiar views of christian doctrine.

"Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian," said King Agrippa to Paul, (Acts xxvi. 28,) after that illustrious Apostle had related to him the history of his own miraculous conversion to Christianity, and had briefly set forth those general truths, in the cordial belief of which all the followers of Christ of every denomination are agreed. Not a single word had he said of what a modern writer represents* as the essential doctrines of "*Catholic*," or universal, "*Christianity*," — namely, — to quote this writer's words, — "the three subsistences in the Invisible Godhead, — the assumption of human nature by the se-

* See Rev. R. W. Hamilton's Address to the Constituents of Airedale College. p. 32.

cond person, his death in this nature to make an atonement, the reality of that mortal death receiving all the efficacy of that divine conserviency; — the influence of the Holy Spirit in separating the objects of divine favor, and succeeding the means of moral appointment; — the *condition* of man as a liability to endless punishment, and his *disposition* as an estrangement from all taste for good and all power of self-recovery, &c." Not one of these peculiar doctrines did the Apostle set forth in that speech, by which he endeavored, with impressive earnestness, to persuade Agrippa "to be a Christian." He stated the circumstances of his own conversion, he asserted the Messiahship and the resurrection of Christ, and, having done so, he solemnly called upon Agrippa to confess the impression that the facts which he had stated, and the arguments which he had urged, had made upon his mind. His appeal was replied to by the response, "almost thou persuadest me to be a *Christian*." Agrippa at least could not have been aware, from anything that Paul had said, that, in order to be a Christian, he must, in addition to the adoption of several other new and mysterious opinions, learn to combine with the ancient Jewish belief in the strict unity of the Godhead, the reception of a doctrine, apparently, if not really, inconsistent with it, namely, that of the tri-personality of the Divine being. Had he been aware of this, it may well be questioned whether his mind would have made even the progress that it did towards conviction. No moderate length of time, and no common cogency of argument would have sufficed, in my opinion, to reconcile the understanding of an intelligent and conscientious Jew to the doctrine of the Three Subsistences in the one Godhead. It is certain that the

Apostle on this occasion said nothing of it; and it is more than probable therefore that Agrippa might have become, not only almost, but altogether, a Christian without believing it.

In one other passage of the New Testament the term "Christian" occurs, not however in such a connexion as to lead us to affix to it any more orthodox and exclusive sense than that of a sincere disciple of Christ. "Let none of you," says the Apostle Peter, in his first Epistle (iv. 15, 16,) "suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer, or as a busy-body, in other men's matters. Yet, if any man suffer as a *Christian* let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf." On the whole then, I think, we may safely affirm that the scriptural sense of the term Christian, to which it might be wise for Christians to adhere, is neither more nor less than that of a disciple of Christ, — of one who, from a sincere belief in Christ's divine commission and Messiahship, chooses him for his instructor and his Lord.

This view of the subject is strongly confirmed by the fact, that a profession of belief in a creed consisting of one article, viz. that "Jesus Christ was the Son of God," was deemed sufficient in the apostolic age to entitle him who made it to christian baptism. "See here is water," said the Eunuch to Philip, who had been preaching unto him Jesus, "what doth hinder me to be baptised? And Philip said, if thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the *Son of God*. And he commanded the chariot to stand still, and they went down, both, into the water, Philip and the Eunuch; and he baptised him." Here certainly we have no proof that to be a baptised Christian it was

necessary to be a believer in the Three Subsistences, the incarnation of the second person, and the other mysterious opinions which uninspired men, not satisfied with believing them themselves, would obtrude as absolutely certain and essential upon the minds of others.

Again read the address of Peter to Cornelius, (Acts x.) containing all the truths, if we may confide in the statement of St. Luke, to which the assent of the devout Centurion was required, previously to his baptism. Not a word will you find in this address to which Christians of all sects, Unitarian as well as Trinitarian, heterodox as well as orthodox, do not yield a ready and full assent. That God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the holy spirit and with power, — that he went about doing good, and working miracles of love and mercy — that he was crucified by the Jews, — that God raised him up the third day, and showed him openly to chosen witnesses, — that he is ordained of God to be the judge of the quick and the dead, — that he is Lord of all, of course under that God who "made him both Lord and Christ," — and that through his name whosoever truly believeth in him shall receive remission of sins: — This is the sum total of St Peter's preaching to Cornelius: these, (unless the statement in the book of Acts is a garbled and deficient one,) are the only articles of faith to which the attention of Cornelius was invited, previously to his baptism. Whatever the good Centurion might subsequently learn, we are certainly led by the narrative of St Luke to the conclusion, that he was baptised and consequently made a member of the Christian Church, without having been initiated into any of the peculiar doctrines of modern orthodoxy.

Once more, peruse that celebrated discourse (Acts ii.)

which the Apostle Peter addressed on the day of Pentecost, immediately after the pouring out of the holy spirit, to the men of Judea, and all them that dwelt at Jerusalem, the fruit of which was the conversion to the christian faith — publicly attested by the baptism — of about three thousand souls. In this discourse likewise we find no doctrine set forth to which professing Christians of every sect cannot heartily subscribe; *set forth*, I say, for as to mere *inferences*, though every individual is, without doubt, at liberty to draw them for himself, as his private judgment dictates, no one is at liberty to draw them for another. The discourse referred to describes Jesus of Nazareth, in express terms, as a man approved of God amongst the Jews by miracles and wonders, and signs which God did by him in the midst of them; it speaks of him as the subject of prophecy: it asserts his resurrection from the dead, his exaltation to the right hand of God, and his communication of the gift of the holy spirit, which he had received from God for them, to his disciples; it represents him as the Lord of David, though descended from him; and concludes with these impressive words, which we may regard as the Apostle's own summary of the substance of his discourse — "Therefore let all the House of Israel know assuredly that *God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.*" Such is the discourse of Peter. That there are one or two expressions in it which Unitarians and Trinitarians will interpret differently, I admit; that it is strikingly and decidedly favorable to the views of the former I firmly believe; but of this I am certain, that no one, possessed of any moderate portion of common sense and candor, will pretend to say that the peculiar and distinctive doc-

trines of modern orthodoxy are taught in it. Catholic Christians of the school of the author above quoted, Peter's three thousand converts could not possibly be at the period of their baptism, unless the sacred historian has grievously misrepresented the Apostle, by suppressing the largest, and, on the orthodox supposition, by far the most important part of his discourse. St Peter at Jerusalem, like St Paul at Athens, (Acts xvii.) gives witness with great power of the divine commission, resurrection, and exaltation of the Lord Jesus, but like him also says not a word of the Three Subsistences, or the Incarnation of the Second Person, or the *popular** doctrine of the Atonement.

These, perhaps, it will be urged, constituted the strong meat for men, which it would have been unwise to administer to babes in Christ, but which would be imparted to them afterwards, as they gained strength to bear it. Holding a very different opinion, believing on the contrary that the doctrines in question are anything but good food either for men or babes, I do not now propose to enter upon any discussion of this point. My sole object at present is to show, that to be a Christian in the Apostolic age, and to be formally recognised as such by baptism, it was not necessary even to have heard of these doctrines,

* The doctrine of the Atonement, in what they maintain to be its true *Scriptural* sense, the doctrine, that is, of the reconciliation of man to God — not of God to man, a form of expression which does not occur once in the New Testament — effected by the death of Christ, and the consequences to which it led, Unitarians do believe; and this doctrine both of the Apostles distinctly recognise in their speeches, when they speak of the universality of the call and the promise, as the fruit of the completed obedience, death, and resurrection of Christ.

much less to have believed them, and that the epithet *Christian*, therefore, in its scriptural sense, is certainly not inclusive of those ideas which would restrict its application to the professors of what is called modern orthodoxy.

"If thou confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus," says the Apostle Paul, (Rom. x. 10,) "and believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved, — for with the heart man believeth to justification, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." — That is, as I understand the Apostle's words, "If you honestly and truly profess to receive Jesus Christ, as your divinely commissioned Lord and Instructer, and if you sincerely believe, with a faith that operates upon the conduct because it has its seat in the heart, that he was raised to life, after his crucifixion, by the power of God, you may henceforth regard yourself as a genuine member of the Christian Church, delivered not only from the yoke of the Jewish law, or the still more oppressive bondage of Heathen superstition, but also from that slavery, which is of all others the most to be deprecated, the slavery of sin." "In this passage," says Mr Belsham, in his valuable Commentary on the Epistles, "the Apostle states in the clearest language the fundamental article of the Christian faith; all that is necessary to entitle a man to be admitted into the community of believers, and to be acknowledged as a Christian brother — 'If thou confess with thy mouth that Jesus is Lord or Master, and believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.'" "How widely different," he adds, "is this truly Apostolic symbol from the long catalogue of mysterious and self-contradictory articles

which are the boast of many Churches calling themselves Christian."

As strikingly confirmatory of the position that the Messiahship of Jesus is the fundamental doctrine of the Gospel, I must not leave unnoticed the emphatic eulogium which our Lord himself pronounced upon Peter, when he first declared his belief in that doctrine. (Matt. xvi. 16.) "He saith unto them, but who say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art *the Christ, the son of the living God.* And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven, and I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church." Upon the orthodox view of the subject this was a meagre confession of Peter's, after all. Upon our view, it was everything that could be desired, for it was all that was necessary to constitute him who made it a Christian, and to qualify him therefore for being a founder of the Christian Church. The importance which our Lord attaches to Peter's confession harmonizes well with the fact, that it was the only one afterwards required to constitute a disciple.

But does it follow, it will be said, that,—because a belief in the Messiahship and Resurrection of Christ is sufficient to admit to membership in his Church, and to give a title to the Christian name,—this therefore is all that a well-instructed Christian may be expected to believe? I am far from asserting that this is the case. The Scriptures of the New Covenant contain a rich treasure of moral and religious truth, an immense number of important facts, doctrines, and precepts, which it is the duty of every sincere Christian to study diligently, and to

understand, and apply to the regulation of his faith and practice, according to the ability which God has given to him. Neither do I dispute that Christ and his Apostles have left on record many sayings, which it is highly important for us to comprehend in their real import, though the comprehension of them be not essential to give us a just title to the Christian name. All that I contend for now is, that sincere discipleship alone is enough to constitute us Christians, and to entitle us to the outward privileges of membership in the universal Church. "The *disciples* were called Christians first at Antioch," and if we too are Christ's disciples, no one has a right to deny that we are Christians. Those who differ from us on points of doctrine may fairly say, if they really think so, that we are not, *in their opinion*, well instructed in the theory, or exemplary and faithful in the practice, of Christianity; but when they deny that we are Christians, they most certainly employ language for which they cannot produce any sufficient warrant, either of reason or of Scripture.

They think us tares, it may be, growing among the wheat, of which they presume themselves to be genuine ears. Suppose them right: are they at liberty therefore to exclude us from the field before our time? Are they quite certain that it is for *them* to make the due discrimination between our nature and their own? Would they not act more modestly, and more wisely, and more scripturally too, if they allowed us to grow quietly and without offence by their side, till that harvest of which the reapers shall be the angels? It is not surely for the wheat to gather *itself* into the garner, or to consign the unhappy tares to the consuming flame! and may it not

well be questioned whether those ears, allowing them the name, are indeed so full and healthy as they should be, which stand so high above their fellows of the field, instead of bowing themselves, as full ears are wont to do, upon the stalk?

In the gospel net, we are told, fishes are caught of every various kind. When it is full it shall be drawn to shore, and the good shall be gathered into vessels, and the bad shall be cast away. But who shall make the selection? The fishes themselves? No — but He to whom the net belongs, and by whom it was cast into the sea.

In the bridal feast amongst the guests, "both bad and good," whom the servants shall have gathered together from the highways, at the bidding of their King, some will doubtless appear unprovided with the wedding garment. Who then shall turn them out? Their fellow-guests? No — it will be for the King, and for him only, to say to his servants, "Bind them hand and foot, and take them away, and cast them into the outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." But may not the companions of these unfortunates lawfully anticipate this result? May they not charitably warn them to go out in due time, and provide a garment like their own, ere the King arrive? By all means, if they are quite sure that their own is the right one, of which, by the way, their thinking so may not be an absolutely certain proof. Even in this case, however, it will be their duty, whatever advice they may think it right to offer in a friendly spirit, to treat those who sit by them with courtesy and kindness, till the King appears, and to remember that, whether worthy or unworthy, they appear at the feast as his bidden guests. They have been

called, and they have come, and it is for him only to decide whether they have or have not made proper provision for their coming. For my own part, I must be allowed to doubt whether any guest who has the real wedding garment on, will either feel disposed, or think himself competent, to pass peremptory sentence on the garb of another. "You call yourself a Christian, but you are not one of my kind, and therefore not a true one," is language which we should hardly expect to hear from the lips of a disciple, who had learned of a meek and lowly Master, and who, like him, was "clothed with humility:" that modest, sober-colored vestment is usually found to hide, even from the wearer's own eyes, the brighter hues and finer qualities of the garments that lie beneath it.

In the formation of his own creed, and the regulation of his own practice, the sincerely devout and humble-minded Christian will find difficulties, and discouragements, abundantly sufficient to prevent him from dogmatizing uncharitably, about either the faith or the practice of other men. What he understands his Divine Master to teach he will reverently learn, and honestly profess, and faithfully improve and apply, but he will not hastily judge his fellow-disciples, or say of any, who have voluntarily assumed his Master's name, that they are unworthy to bear it. In his character of learner he may feel constrained to believe that he understands his Instructer's words better than those who give a different interpretation to them, but he will recollect that, after all, there is at least a possibility of their being right, and that, even if they do err, the errors of their understanding may not have their source in the depravity of their hearts, but may

arise from other causes, not inconsistent with their diligence, docility, and conscientiousness as learners. Fellow-disciples they may deserve to be called in despite of their errors, and if fellow-disciples, then fellow-Christians.

My Unitarian Brethren, I have asserted your right, in common with my own, to the Christian name, in the humble confidence that you are willing and anxious to be numbered amongst those who *learn of Christ*. This character, I am sure, you will not disclaim ; of this character labor and pray that you may prove yourselves worthy. Let me conclude by reminding you of a few of the duties which it involves.

And, in the first place, if you are disciples of Christ, worthy of the name, you will learn of *him only*. His school is not one in which the pupils are commissioned and empowered to perform the Master's duty. "Learn of *me*" is his injunction, not "learn of *mine*." You will find, indeed, many of your uninspired fellow-disciples very willing, and, in their own opinions, quite competent, to teach you ; they will kindly offer to save you the trouble of personal inquiry ; they will give you lists properly numbered, and arranged, and drawn up in terms even more clear and explicit than those of Scripture, of the articles, both essential, and non-essential, of the Christian faith : they will tell you exactly what you *must*, and what you *may*, and what you *may not* believe in order to salvation My friends, by whatsoever name they may call themselves, — in whatsoever place they may address you · whether they occupy the chair of the professor or the pulpit of the divine ; whether they speak to you from this pulpit or from any other ; be their reputation for talent, in-

tegrity, and soundness in the faith, high or low ; — trust them not. Receive not, on their bare assertion, anything that they may say of Christ or of his law ; but go at once to the fountain-head ; and inquire of Christ himself. Search the Scriptures, and ascertain, to the best of your ability, from them, what are the articles — not of the Catholic Christianity of the present day, which it is of small importance for you to know — but of that Christianity which Jesus himself taught, — which deserves therefore to be, — and in the final result of all things certainly will be, — Catholic. The fictions of opinion, says a wise heathen, time blots out ; the just but slowly-matured decisions of truth and reason it confirms. Be it your sole aim to understand aright the lessons of the Master, as they proceed from his own lips and those of his *inspired* followers. Trouble not yourselves to determine whether your interpretation of his words be, or be not, that which is commonly adopted. If it be the true one, you may rest assured that it will become popular in due time ; and if it be not true, no popularity can sanction it, or prevent its ultimate rejection.

Secondly, if you be true disciples of Christ, you will learn of him *fearlessly*, as well as exclusively. You will not go about timidly inquiring of your fellow-christians what they think of Christ, and fashioning your thoughts by theirs, but you will seriously and deliberately form, and then honestly profess, your own opinion. Only be diligent, humble-minded, devout searchers after truth, and you may rest assured that no speculative errors into which you may fall, in the conscientious exercise of the powers which God has given you, can endanger your final welfare. Reverently listen to the great Instructer :

put forth all your mental energies to comprehend, digest and apply his lessons; and fear not that he will visit you with his displeasure for any involuntary inaccuracy of judgment, or defect of comprehension. Your disagreement from your fellow-disciples in opinion need give you no concern, if you are satisfied that you have exerted your own best judgment; and unless you have done so, their agreement with you ought to give you no satisfaction. Be Christians, according to your knowledge and ability, both in theory and practice, and you may then deem it a matter of comparative, if not absolute, indifference whether you are called or thought so. Obloquy from some quarter or other is sure to follow a fearless pursuit and maintenance of truth; but the true disciple of Christ will not bate a jot of his righteous ardor, in the cause of what he deems pure religion, on this account. He will act resolutely upon his own view of Christ's instructions, even though the consequence should be his being denounced, by those who differ from him, as no Christian. The man who is ashamed of that form of doctrine which he regards as genuine Christianity is in fact ashamed of Christ, and of him, therefore, there is the greatest reason to fear that Christ will be ashamed in the last day. Our opinions, brethren, may be peculiar, they may be unpopular, but if we believe them, — after due examination conducted in the proper spirit, — to be scriptural and true, we shall prove ourselves cowards and traitors to our Master's cause, if we do not openly profess, and zealously, yet meekly, promulgate them. It is hard, certainly, that our fellow-disciples should "separate us from their company, and reproach us, and cast out our name as evil — for the Son of Man's sake," — or, what amounts

to the same thing, for our profession of that doctrine, which we conscientiously believe him to have taught. Nevertheless we must be ready to bear this, and, if need be, a great deal more than this, in what we think his cause. We must not sacrifice his good opinion for that of his frail fallible followers. He that loveth father or mother, son or daughter, sect or system, the world's approval or the world's friendship, more than Christ, is not worthy of him. In the words of the Apostle, then, "Let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil doer, or as a busy body in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a *Christian*, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf."

Thirdly, as disciples of Christ it is your duty to learn of him, with *attentive* and *unprejudiced* minds. Nothing can more strikingly evince the necessity of diligence and impartiality in the study of the gospel records than the vast variety of clashing and contradictory opinions which the followers of Jesus hold respecting the doctrines that he taught. Numberless are the sects into which the Christian world is divided. Sincere and good men, genuine disciples of their common Master, may be found, there cannot be a doubt, in all of them. How then is it that they have differed, and continue to differ, so widely? This is not, surely, to be ascribed altogether to the difficulty of the subject, or the ambiguity of the terms in which the doctrines of Christ have been conveyed; but, in part at least, to the strong prejudices, of various kinds, with which the study of the gospel has been, for the most part, commenced; and the precipitancy, inaccuracy, and eager desire to arrive at conclusions before premises have been well considered, with which it has been

carried on. On a subject respecting which opinions so various are held, it is clear that no one can be well-instructed, or come to just conclusions, who does not sedulously endeavor to free his mind from every improper bias, and to fix it closely and steadily on the best and purest sources of information. Let the disciple of Christ, placing no reliance on what uninspired men have taught, sit daily at his Master's feet, meditate upon his words, and carefully compare together the instructions which he has given them at various times; thus only will he arrive at any real and comprehensive knowledge of his will. Do not, my friends, accustom yourselves too much to consult your fellow-disciples; for, if you do, they will soon perplex you by the variety and discordance of their opinions; but never cease, not even for a single day, to study the lessons of the Master. Commentators and controversialists are the great multipliers of sects. The repeated perusal of the Scriptures themselves, with no other aids than those which may be strictly called illustrative, such as history, geography, Jewish antiquities, &c, is perhaps the very best remedy that can be prescribed for the boundless confusion and discord that the writings of theological system-makers have produced.

Once more, and finally, as disciples of Christ, *cherish a becoming spirit, and act in a proper manner, towards your fellow-disciples.* Learners we are all of us; let none of us, then, usurp the teacher's office. To be helpers of each other's faith, to assist each other, according to our ability, in understanding and applying the lessons of the Instructer, whose authority we all revere, — this we should regard both as a duty and a privilege: but to dictate the conclusion at which our fellow-disci-

ples must arrive, — to lay down the law for them in their Master's name, — and to pronounce them foolish or perverse, deficient in understanding or in moral rectitude, should they refuse to acquiesce in our decisions — this will be to forget our characters as learners, to desert the disciple's — and invade the Master's — province. We may think our associates in study mistaken in their views; so far indeed as these differ from our own, we must do so. Should evidence to that effect present itself, we may even be unable to avoid the conclusion, to which, however, we should always come with the utmost reluctance, that they are rebellious and perverse: but to decide dogmatically, upon either their opinions or actions, to speak with the confidence of heart-searching judges on the subject, and to anathemize, or cut them off as diseased members from the body of the Universal Church, before the unerring sentence of the common Lord has been pronounced, — such conduct is anything but becoming in those who are themselves in a state of pupilage. "One is our Master, even Christ, and all we are brethren." Even an inspired Apostle disclaimed the right to "exercise dominion over the faith" of his own converts, and desired them to regard him in no other character than as "the helper of their joy."

To learn ourselves with attention and docility, and while we do so to lend all the aid that we can to our associates, — to animate the good with cheering words of approbation, — to encourage the diffident, — to help on the slow, — to correct with modesty those whom we think in error, — to exhort with meekness, and, should we be unable to convince, to pity and pray for the perverse, — to set the best example that we can ourselves, — and to

hail with unfeigned self-abasement, and with cordial love and admiration, the superior excellence of others, — this will be to perform, in the best manner, the part of Christian learners, whose duty it is to combine the kindest affections towards their fellow-disciples, with the deepest reverence for their common Lord. Thus let us act, beloved brethren, that, whether our claim be recognised on earth or not, we may at least prove ourselves *worthy* to be called Christians here, and may at length be owned as such in heaven.